

Pioneer Press: Gurnee Review, May 27, 2004

Thanks to some very devoted volunteers, including a few who literally slept in Gurnee Grade School a few nights, students will have a home to come back to this fall.

Although some water from the flooding Des Plaines River seeped in, volunteers and school officials were able to keep the recently reopened school in good shape. However, school officials said they will not reopen the school during the remainder of this school year.

Gurnee Elementary District 56 Superintendent Ben Martindale is thrilled with the amount of support his district received in recent days to stave off the rising flood waters. Sump-pumps and dry-vacs were kept running almost 24 hours a day. Along with school officials and parents, about 100 sailors from the Great Lakes Naval Station offered their assistance.

"The volunteers have contributed over the last four to five days, working around the clock since Friday to do everything possible," said Martindale, who slept in the school several nights to oversee volunteer efforts.

"For now the sandbags are holding their own, keeping the water out," he said early Tuesday evening. "We are grateful for that."

As of Wednesday morning, water around the school, which left the building looking like an island, was down five to six inches.

In the 1986 flood, the district didn't fare as well. Gurnee Grade and Viking schools completely flooded. The damage was so serious that students from both schools were forced to attend classes at Lakehurst Mall for the remainder of the school year.

At that time, the school "did not have drainage modifications, did not have sandbags and had not moved stuff out of the basement," Martindale said.

This time, however, advanced notice from the village helped tremendously, he said. School officials were able to get the necessary equipment, move everything from the basement and build sandbag walls around the school.

The fight was especially important to school officials because Gurnee Grade just reopened in August after being closed for many years. District 56 spent about \$500,000 on renovations, which included painting and electrical work, modifying the entrance and installing new windows.

Martindale credits many people for keeping the school safe, but he singled out a few outstanding individuals. Besides his maintenance staff and volunteers from the Gurnee Park District and Gurnee Public Works, he said school official Mike Nichols, civil engineer Pat Bleck and parent Brian Weir, put in extra efforts. All three men slept at the school several nights, keeping the crews going with pumps and water vacs.

"I can't say enough for the help we have received," Martindale said. "Everybody chipped in to save their school."

Sailors help critical

Cmdr. Hank Roux Jr., executive officer at the Great Lakes Naval Station, said during the first few days of work to save the school, about 100 sailors, in four shifts, helped fill sand bags at Warren Township High School's O'Plaine Campus.

A statement from U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-10th, noted that the sailors were led by Petty Officer Alan Dementer, who recently returned from Iraq. Dementer received the Bronze Star for his work with the First Marine Expeditionary Force.

"They're so excited about doing it," Roux said of the sailors working to save Gurnee Grade School. "They're young men and women who are dedicated to their community and to the country."

During a flood summit in Deerfield Monday night, which included local mayors and federal and state officials, Kirk praised the sailors for their work.

Although Gurnee Grade School remains in good shape, District 56 officials decided to keep the school closed for the remainder of the school year. The school is still surrounded by flood waters and is accessible only by boat.

Martindale said Gurnee Grade students will be split up and sent to O'Plaine and Spaulding Schools to finish out their last four school days, from June 1-4.

Viking Middle School, which is also surrounded by water, will also remain closed. Those students will be sent to Woodland District 50's Primary and Intermediate schools to finish the year. The waters did not threaten Viking School, as it sits on higher ground.

Students were originally slated to finish the school year June 3. Martindale plans to meet with district faculty today and Friday to work out details for the last week of school.

Warren Township High School has also been closed since Monday, but officials expect school to resume Friday.

High school officials were most concerned with flooding in its field house, which sits at the lowest point on the property, closest to the river. On Monday, the water was at the doorsteps of the field house. Volunteers spent hours sandbagging the back of the school to keep the river water at bay.

By Wednesday, the water had reached only the southwest corner of the field house, and there was some standing water in the school's north parking lot. The buses normally parked in that lot were moved to the Almond Campus before the flooding began. The school's football field and track area were also under water.

"Because the river didn't rise as high as anticipated ... our worst fears did not materialize," said Mary Olson, director of instruction and school improvement.

Warren could have held school this week, but officials were concerned that buses would be unable to transport students around Gurnee.

Finals were scheduled for this week, so students were given a little extra time to prepare. Most of the high school's activities were also canceled this week, except for some sporting events and graduation practice on Friday at the Almond campus. Graduation will go ahead as scheduled at Northwestern University on Saturday.

Parents can learn more information by looking at the high school's Web site, http://www.house.gov/htbin/leave_site?In_url=http://www.WTHS.net

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Staff Writer Korrina Grom contributed to this article.

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